

**Testimony before U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
by Scott Angelle, Secretary, Louisiana Department of Natural Resources
Field Hearing held in New Orleans, LA
Friday, August 26, 2005**

Mr. Chairman -- I am honored to sit before you today to testify on behalf of the pending WRDA bill and a provision that is of critical importance to my state of Louisiana – the Louisiana Coastal Area Ecosystem Restoration Plan (LCA).

As you well know, Senator, Louisiana's coast – America's Wetland – provides benefits to our nation that are unrivaled by any other coastal area in the United States – benefits that include the hosting of 80 percent of the nation's offshore oil and gas supply, a third of the nation's fisheries' landings, wildlife habitat for the second largest flyway in the U.S., and the nursery ground for marine life for the entire Gulf of Mexico. These working wetlands also provide protection from storm surge for the world's largest port system and for the two million citizens who live and work in Louisiana's coastal zone.

As these wetlands continue to disappear at the alarming rate of 24 square miles a year, the nation's economic and energy security is put at great risk. As energy pipelines are exposed to open Gulf conditions and protected wetland areas become open bays, the national environmental and economic implications are unthinkable.

The loss of America's Wetland has reached crisis proportions and the Congress must address it as a "special circumstance" through both funding and speed of action. The restoration needs of this area cannot be compared with the Everglades or with any other ecosystem in this country. No place else on the planet is experiencing this magnitude of land loss and no place else will the impacts to the United States be so severe.

There are many causes of Louisiana's land loss, both natural and man-made, not the least of which is the leveeing of the Mississippi River – done for the best of reasons to protect citizens from flooding and for the nation's navigation needs. But the unintended consequences of this Federal action prevented the natural flooding of the river from depositing sediment and fresh water in this great delta so that the wetlands replenish and rebuild.

Oil and gas pipeline canals and east/west navigation channels have exacerbated the loss by allowing saltwater intrusion and wave action to further degrade the system.

The natural subsidence of the land and sea level rise also play a part in the destruction.

This is not about blame, but about all of us pulling together to save this strategic area and to sustain its values for future generations of Americans.

Because of the special circumstances surrounding Louisiana's unique situation, I would like to point out certain elements of the proposed LCA plan that we consider crucial to our success in saving this ecosystem:

- Louisiana is proposing a 35% state/65% Federal cost share match, not just because ours is a poor state and will find it difficult to achieve even that level of matching funds. Because of the Federal actions associated with the loss and the national benefits derived from this area, we feel the cost share is more than justified. Unless and until there is a permanent and steady stream of revenues like those tied to the sharing of Outer Continental Shelf revenues, Louisiana would not have the ability to carry a greater cost share burden.

Our citizens are serious about using such funds for the purpose of restoring our coast. In our legislative session that just ended, enabling legislation was passed unanimously that would allow our people to vote on a constitutional amendment to dedicate the first \$600 million a year to this purpose. We have reason to believe such an amendment will pass a vote of the people overwhelmingly, as three others have passed in recent years that would help prepare us to fund this massive effort.

- The recent passage by Congress of the Energy Bill is the first major step in this direction and on behalf of all of us in Louisiana, I thank you Senator and our entire delegation for your great victory. We consider it a tremendous down payment for the work ahead. We refer to it as a down payment, not out of greed, but out of critical need of a permanent funding source.

The President has stated that Louisiana and the other coastal producing states should use the revenues to draw down further Federal funds. Because of this, we would like to see language in WRDA that states that these and future such revenues can be accepted to match other Federal dollars, such as through a WRDA bill.

- As we embark on our plans for spending the Energy Bill funds, we will be jump-starting scientific modeling for projects included in the LCA and accelerating the design and construction of these projects. Therefore, we feel it is absolutely necessary for this work to be accepted as in-kind credit by the Corps of Engineers.
- I spoke of the urgency and need for swift action to address this devastating land loss. Ironically, it will probably not be the lack of funding that prevents us from achieving our goal, but the cumbersome, protracted Corps of Engineers process we must endure. By the Corps' own admission, it takes an average of 11 years from authorization to completion of a Corps project. That's an average. We have a river diversion that took twice that length of time to complete.

Louisiana does not have the luxury of that kind of “business as usual”. Sounds good on paper, but the reality is we will have very little land to save if the LCA is not treated as a “special circumstance” and urgent changes to the present Corps process are not made.

- The question has been raised about the need to continue the CWPPRA program in light of an authorization of the LCA. Louisiana’s response is a resounding “yes”. A job this big requires more than one tool and since Congress enacted the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act in 1990, the program has played a key role.

A large-scale restoration program, even a near term program as envisioned by the LCA, is fundamentally different in scale and approach. CWPPRA is a program that can roll out projects in less than five years in response to critical, local needs. It fills the gaps through its flexibility and comparatively quick turn-around time and addresses smaller, yet critical projects that buy us time as we tackle the larger, longer-term solutions.

CWPPRA has forged valuable partnerships, not only between the State of Louisiana and its five Federal partners led by the Corps of Engineers, but with our local parishes, who depend on the program

The CWPPRA program must remain active if we are to protect key national assets and ensure the safety of our citizens. The crisis will not wait while the more massive projects are fine-tuned. In short, CWPPRA is responsive, fiscally prudent, complementary of the LCA plan, community-supported, well established and science based. (I have included a document with my written testimony entitled “The Case for CWPPRA” that details the critical role CWPPRA plays in our restoration efforts.)

- Finally, I would like to address an element of the proposed LCA plan that the state of Louisiana considers imperative to its success – the Science and Technology Program. The design of the LCA plan is based on the continued need for sound science and engineering to guide the effort. The value of an independent, yet inclusive science and tech program is undisputed by state and Federal agencies, NGOs and our coastal stakeholders.

I have included with my written testimony a short document that outlines the S&T Program proposed in the LCA plan. It includes a science advisory board – named by and given oversight by the USGS, a science coordination board, and other elements that ensure the coordination of all appropriate Federal and state agencies, as well as front-line scientists from academic institutions in and out of the state.

It has taken the work of many people more than a year to design the proposed S&T program and the result has been buy-in at every level. We feel it would

be unacceptable for the program to be turned over to any one Federal agency to direct and implement.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to stress to the Committee that Louisiana is a land in crisis. There is no excuse for business as usual. We are experiencing an emergency. Because of the national benefits provided by this coastal area and the national impacts associated with this crisis, Congress should recognize it as a special circumstance and address efforts to save it accordingly.

Thank you for taking the time to hear the views of the State of Louisiana today on this issue so critical to our survival and to the future of our nation.